

The 10th Element

Thank you for the invitation to take part in this important symposium.

As an Eastern Aranda woman I acknowledge the traditional owners/occupiers on whose land this gathering is held

and in the face of all oppression and dispossession of land, culture and family, as with all our Aboriginal peoples of this land who have had the sustainability of being to adapt to those external forces which would attempt to diminish our existence, the Kurna continue hold strong.

I also pay my respects to members of all Indigenous communities who are present, particularly to those of our visiting speakers.

In undertaking research for this presentation, I had already decided that the

title of this talk was “Is that what God really wanted?” when undertaking

research for this presentation I viewed an interview in 2009 by with Prof

Robert Miller on the Doctrine of Discovery, where (the interviewer , , ,) asked

whether there were any dissident elements in European civilisation . . . and Prof

Miller's response was that "I am not aware of any European thinking that God

did not ordain this, that God did not mean this to happen."

While I felt that it signified a serendipitous synchronicity of thought and

positioning I have amended the title to THE 9TH ELEMENT with the sub-title "**is**

this what God really wanted?"

Also in preparing for tonight, I was struck by the thought that in many ways

discussion on historical documents and rulings and historical actions by

nations of peoples over centuries of time on the other side of the globe can in a

sense create a gentle, cotton wool comfort for people – a protection granted by

the safe distance of time. We must guard ourselves against the temptation of

this comfort because, in the words of Luis Enrique

Indigenous people are modern people living in the contemporary world.

Forget the Indigenous people who live in your imaginations. Work with real

Indigenous people and their realities”.

Professor Miller defines the Doctrine of Discovery as being comprised of 10 Elements. The focus for this talk will be on element numbers 8 and 9 – that of Christianisation and Civilisation of the natives and specifically the application of that task on half-caste children in Australia in the 1950s.

The underlying principles of the Doctrine of Discovery can be found in the 1837 **‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements):** (House of Commons, 1837) which recorded concerns by some British parliamentarians and members of the elite around the provision of protective justice for native peoples who were subjected to settler abuse. The Report asked the question:

‘Whether... it would be advisable to begin with civilization in order to introduce Christianity or with Christianity in order to lead to civilization’

(House of Commons 1837, 3).

The fact that the question was asked in the British House of Commons shows the inextricable intertwining of relationship between the church and the state.

Both ramparts of the colonising power of *this* continent spoke the same language – both knew and understood the expected actions to be taken towards and imposed upon the natives which were intrinsically embedded in **the words “Christianity” and “Civilisation”**.

It was no different in Australia during the period of time leading up to federation, when grounded in the belief that the Aboriginal race was doomed to extinction, a demise which was **‘decreed by God or nature’** (McGregor 1998, ix), there was little effort to specifically include Aborigines in federation debates (McGregor 2011, xvii-xix).

Aboriginal people – **and particularly the increasing population of “half-castes”** -continued to be **“problematic”** to the Australian nation as a whole, both

socially and politically, and as in earlier decades and centuries, church and state worked together to devise solutions to this problem.

In the late 1930s these relationships strengthened, and in 1939, the then Minister for the Interior – the Hon John McEwen, delivered the ‘Northern Territory of Australia Commonwealth Government’s Policy with Respect to **Aboriginals**’ of 1939 (McEwen 1939)

- Influential in the writing of the policy was the then Professor of Anthropology of the University of Sydney, who in his discussions with McEwen during the writing of the policy, stated ‘**Somehow or other the Christian life must be made to grow out of at the same time as it purifies the old Aboriginal way of life**’ (Elkin papers; Elkin to Ferrier 1940 130/12/95), ‘**Somehow or other the Christian life must be made to grow out of at the same time as it purifies the old Aboriginal way of life**’

An immediate outcome of the 1939 policy was an approach to the federal government by the Methodist Overseas Mission (MOM) with a proposal to

establish a site for half-caste children to implement the terms of the new policy.

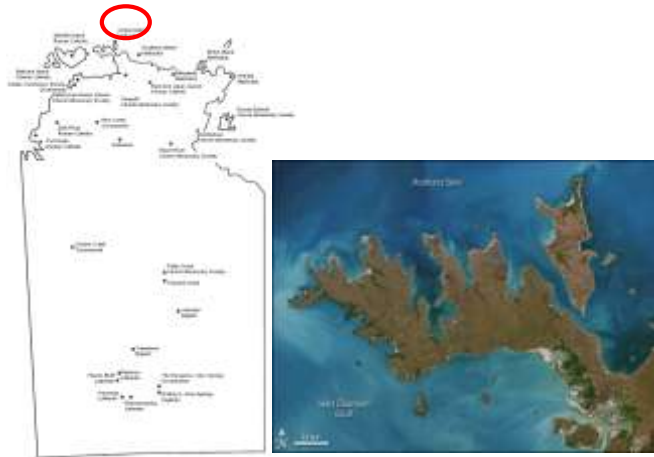
The business of the mission would be to deliver training, civilising and Christianising transformations of predominantly Northern and Central Australian half-caste Aboriginal. **The first mention of the ‘new’ ‘half-caste scheme’ by the Methodist Overseas Mission appears on 16 May 1940.**

Discussion concerning a site occurs on 1 June, 1940 (MOM records; CY3775, 196-7). Subsequently, a search was undertaken by the Rev. Leonard Kentish, Chairman of the Methodist Northern Australian Mission District (and later first Superintendent of the new mission). He reported back to General Secretary for the Methodist Missionary Society, the Reverend J. W. Burton, that Croker Island—situated 260 kilometres north east of Darwin in the Arafura Sea—presented the best site for this new endeavour (MOM records; 451/5053).

The result was the granting by King George the Sixth to the Methodist

Overseas Mission Trust ‘all that... piece of land known as Croker Island’ (MOM

records; 451 574/575).



The Aim of work with part-Europeans . . appears to be to aid them to achieve social competence in a society which is predominantly European and nominally Christian, thus requiring training in: Religion and Ethics; Health and Hygiene – personal and social

Embedded in these Aims we have an undisrupted continuum of the Doctrine of Discovery – not only does it provide the underpinnings for the ways in which disadvantage for Aboriginal people is constructed today in all its various identified forms, this Doctrine, unknown to Aboriginal peoples and societies formed foundations of attempted reconstructions of Aboriginal lives, and in many ways while the Doctrine and its words are not common **knowledge for Australia’s Indigenous peoples, we can identify that our** existence has been thus framed.

And I am left with my sub-title **“Is this what God wanted?”**